

# Strengthening Working Families Initiative (SWFI) Overview

## Why is there a need for a program like SWFI?

**6 out of 10** households with children have all parents working (married working and single working parents), increasing the need for affordable, quality childcare.

On June 23, 2014, President Obama convened the *White House Summit on Working Families* to discuss necessary changes in society, business policies and in the laws to ensure that all Americans have the opportunity to have a job and family. Access to such care can be difficult due to costs and limited funding to cover costs. Additionally, when affordable child care exists, parents, in particular those with low incomes

and low skills, have to deal with unpredictable situations (i.e. sick child, child care provider closes, other emergencies) where an alternative solution is needed but care is unavailable. Compounding this matter is when these parents cannot afford to take unpaid leave and/or work in less flexible workplaces. Lack of access to affordable and consistent child care can keep parents from participating in training and educational programs. Of the 21 million low-income parents, only one in 10 participate in education and training. Those who are in education and training programs, almost half were working, indicating an additional burden of arranging for and paying the cost of child care while pursuing these activities.<sup>1</sup>

Training and education can help move parents into better paying jobs, however, **some employment barriers also serve as barriers to participating in training and educational programs.**

## What is the aim of SWFI?

The Strengthening Working Families Initiative (SWFI) was created to provide low- to middle- skilled parents with opportunities to advance in their careers in high growth or demand industries (health care, IT and advanced manufacturing), addressing barriers to accessing training and employment faced by those with child care responsibilities. It also aims to address childcare needs for parents seeking education and training, increase access to child care resources and bridge the gap between the workforce and child care systems. Projects are funded that address both the individual job training needs and child care barriers of workers while developing or improving systems navigation services that will result in sustainable systemic changes in a community.<sup>2</sup>

## What is Rochester Rehabilitation Center's SWFI program?

**Rochester Rehabilitation Center (RRC) is one of 14 SWFI grantees – and the only organization in New York State to receive the grant.**

The Strengthening Working Families Initiative (or SWFI) is a four-year (2016-2020) \$4M grant funded by the U.S. Department of Labor. SWFI provides low- to middle-skilled parents opportunities to advance in their careers in high-growth or in high-demand industries – including health care, advanced manufacturing, and information technology – while addressing barriers related to accessing training and employment faced by those with child care responsibilities.

The Strengthening Working Families Initiative (SWFI) is a collaborative that includes the lead agency, Rochester Rehabilitation Center, two subcontracted agencies, Child Care Council, Inc. and Action for a Better Community, Inc. (ABC) and several partners representing employers, businesses, education and training institutions, and community organizations.

*Eligibility: Participants must be a low- to middle- skilled parent with a child(ren) under the age of 13 (or with a child[ren] 14 years and older with a disability). Additionally, participants must be enrolled in one of the following training program areas: health care, IT or advanced manufacturing.*

<sup>1</sup> Paragraph is from excerpts of Strengthening Working Families Initiative RFP.

<sup>2</sup> Paragraph is from excerpts of Strengthening Working Families Initiative RFP.

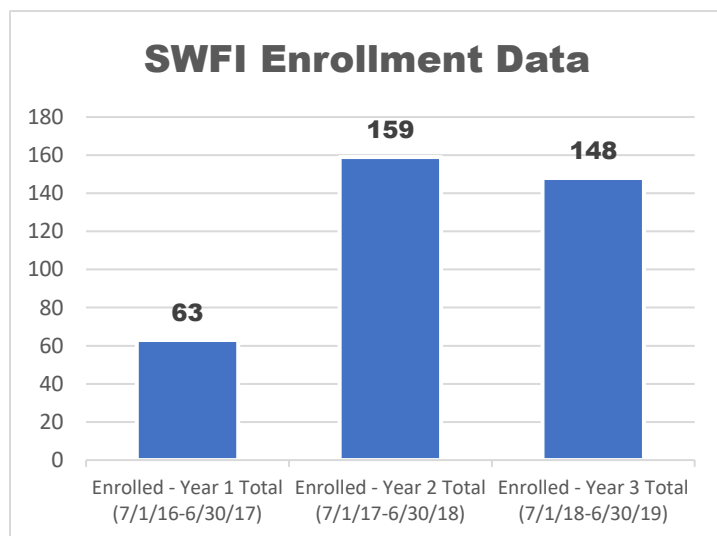
Rochester Rehabilitation Center (RRC) provides family and career navigation services. Its programming creates access to living wage jobs and supports career advancement in high-demand industries for parents with dependent children at home. Job training, job placement, career advancement, and benefits management are all a part of this initiative. Child care navigation services are provided by **Child Care Council, Inc.**, which includes assisting program participants with searching for quality child care services while in training, navigating available funding sources, and providing access to SWFI child care subsidies for those not qualifying for any other funding source. **Action for a Better Community, Inc. (ABC)** provides systems level activities to make systemic improvements in child care provision and employment services that help systems be more responsive and that result in positive outcomes for participants.

## What are we learning so far?

### Keys to SWFI's Success:

- ❖ Onsite recruitment at training sites
- ❖ Childcare Navigator to help parents navigate child care system and access child care resources
- ❖ Family and career navigators to provide encouragement and ongoing support to participants, as well as to help parents navigate various systems (e.g. linkage to supportive services, help with paying for the cost of books, uniforms, transportation-gas card/bus pass, and offering incentives for completing key milestones such as obtaining a certificate/certification)
- ❖ Partnerships with trainers, especially those that offer training that lead directly to employment (training to employment pipeline)
- ❖ Partnerships with individuals/entities, many of whom are members of the SWFI PROGRESS Advisory Committee, that lend their expertise and support to the program. Additionally, forming/serving on coalitions/collaboratives to pursue a common vision or goal

### Results:



### Family & Career Navigation Services Provided by Rochester Rehabilitation Center

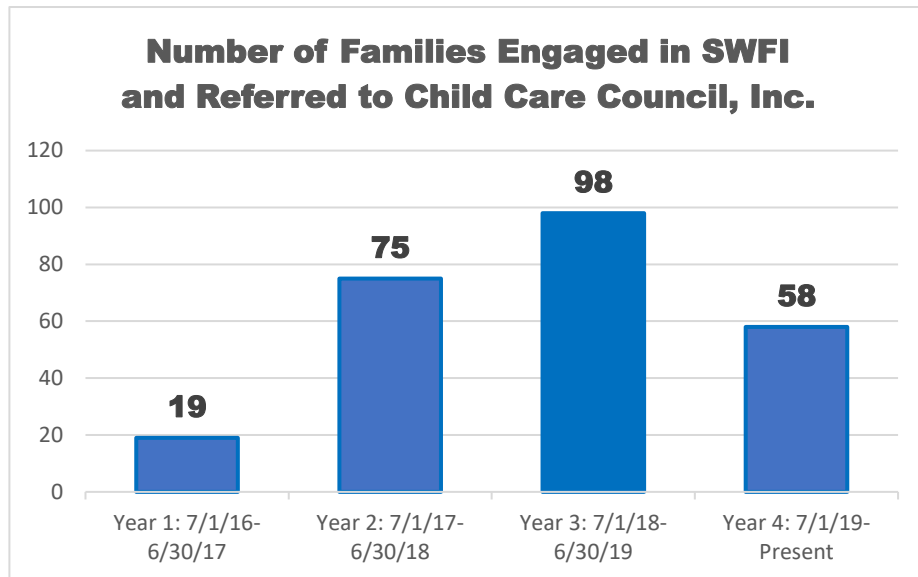
Overall total enrollment for SWFI was 370, as of 6/30/19. The graph shows the yearly breakdown.

- Nearly all of the participants were female (96%).
- About ninety percent were ages 17-39.
- The racial composition of participants are as follows: 74% were African American, 9% were Caucasian and 4% represented other racial groups. Thirteen percent were Hispanic/Latino.
- Nearly an even split was employed (49%) and unemployed (51%).
- Over four-fifth (86%) were receiving some form of public assistance.

- Among those enrolled: 88% were in the healthcare training field, 7% were in the IT training field and 5% were in the advanced manufacturing field.
- Seventy-six percent of enrolled participants lived in the following top ten zip codes: 14621, 14611, 14609, 14605, 14619, 14606, 14613, 14615, 14608 and 14620.

In the most recent reporting year (2018-2019), among those who enrolled in a SWFI qualified training program (156), nearly seventy percent completed training and over four-fifths (86%) obtained employment.

#### Child Care Navigation Support Provided by Child Care Council, Inc.



A total of 250 families were engaged in SWFI and referred to Childcare Council, Inc., to date. The graph shows the yearly breakdown.

- A total of 206 children had their childcare costs paid through the SWFI grant.
- A total of 73 childcare programs were utilized over this period:
  - o 25 center-based care
  - o 14 family-based child care
  - o 30 group family-based child care
  - o 4 school age care

Findings from Systems Level Activities work has resulted in the following recommendations so far:

- **Provide funding to enable strategic, broad reaching promotion/marketing of available community child care resources – funding and other child care resources – to stakeholders.** Our findings indicate that many community members (including low-income and working parents, those working directly with the target population) are unaware of available funding to help the target population pay for the cost of child care. Through partnering with staff representing local childcare funding resources (e.g. MCDHS Upstate Revitalization Initiative Child Care Subsidy, Workforce Development Initiative Child Care Subsidy), a few events were coordinated to promote resources and a one-page child care funding resource directory has been created that will soon be disseminated community-wide. A child care fair to promote child care resources is planned for 2020.
- **Explore ways to address, communitywide, parents’ need for affordable, quality child care when they may work non-traditional hours, require care only for certain periods of time, or need care for other reasons.** Childcare providers linked to SWFI have been accommodating to families needing various type of care – for example, transporting children to and from their program, accommodating variant schedules for care. One barrier SWFI identified and remedied early was to cover child care cost while a parent waits 30-45 days to transition from one source of funding (paying for childcare) to another, after he/she completes training, without interruption in care. Systems level activities staff will spend time documenting instances for when care is needed and develop strategies to address these instances, if there is no community solution. Additionally, staff, with the help of child care experts who have been convening for a few months, are exploring the idea of a child care roundtable to support Governor Cuomo’s NYS Child Care Availability Taskforce – it would provide community (especially parent) voice into workable solutions.
- **Create and/expand the number of child care navigators and training navigators that are deployed in the community from two key pillars – Child Care Council, Inc. and RochesterWorks, Inc., to help low-income and working parents navigate and access resources within these systems.** We learned through

conversations with childcare care experts that a viable solution is to have navigators strategically placed in the community such as the four quadrants of the city of Rochester or at various organizations serving specific populations. We learned through meetings with training entities that there is a need for navigation services that include developing a user-friendly training directory to help individuals identify training opportunities. A training fair to promote training resources and training opportunities, especially those leading to employment, is planned for 2020.

- **Training programs should consider offering instruction in a hybrid-style, which would enable students to obtain some of their training online and the remaining training be provided in a traditional classroom setting** in order to accommodate students who cannot afford to spend full time in the classroom due to a variety of reasons (e.g. inability to take time off work). We learned through meetings with training entities that enrollment in traditional classroom settings are lower than desired and that introducing a hybrid-style may help to boost enrollment numbers. Additionally, there is a need to explore how trainers are addressing and can better address students' need for wrap-around services (e.g. child care, transportation). Findings can be used to develop strategies around student retention. Other enrollment barriers still exist: for example, inability to pass entrance exams, which need attention. This is an area that will be explored by systems level activities staff.
- **Provide funding to support opportunities for the target population to “earn while they learn”**, meaning to provide students with a stipend while they participate in training, especially for longer term trainings. Our findings indicate that the target population need help paying for training – many cannot afford to work while they are in training and/or participate in training without financial support.
- **Increase the number of training-employment pipeline programs, incorporating key success areas learned through SWFI (denoted above). Include SWFI qualified training areas and expand to other industries.** Additionally, explore holding community training fairs with employers hiring on the spot so that individuals can obtain work experience while going through training. The latter is a suggestion shared during meetings with training entities.

## **WHAT OPPORTUNITIES ARE ON THE HORIZON?**

The Strengthening Working Families Initiative (SWFI) is in its last year of funding. Program staff have and will continue to pursue funding opportunities to sustain the program and to continue the strides that Rochester Rehabilitation Center's SWFI program has made with the support of its partners. In particular, SWFI will be seeking ways to better connect with training programs, especially those it has yet to form a partnership, in particular, in the IT and advanced manufacturing fields. The breakfast provides an opportunity to expand the collaborative partners to help bridge the gaps for low-income, low- to middle-skilled, and working families.

**For more information about SWFI and/or to enroll into the program, contact:**

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